DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 027 317 24 TE 001 263

Unit 702: Changes in the Meanings of Words, I.
Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Center for Curriculum Development in English.
Spons Agency-Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
Bureau No-BR-5-0658
Pub Date 68
Contract-OEC-SAE-3-10-010
Note-43p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$2.25
Descriptors-Abstraction Levels, American English, *Curriculum Guides, Diachronic Linguistics, English Curriculum, *English Instruction, Expressive Language, *Grade 7, Instructional Materials, *Language, Language Usage, Secondary Education, *Semantics, Standard Spoken Usage, Teaching Methods, Verbal Communication
Identifiers-Minnesota Center Curriculum Development in English, *Project English

In this seventh-grade language unit, the study of semantics is introduced by an examination of the relationships between words and their referents, particularly in terms of changes of meaning and degrees of abstraction. Classroom activities are suggested to help students become aware of "language liveliness" and the processes of specialization and generalization: e.g., mapmaking, designing abstraction ladders and Venn diagrams, playing competitive games, comparing words from Samuel Johnson's "Dictionary" with present-day usage, and studying "The Most Dangerous Game" for changes in the words "hunt" and "animal." The writings of S. I. Hayakawa, Neil and Simon Postman, Jonathan Swift, and others are used to emphasize that changes and variations in word meanings are both natural and inevitable. Supplementary activities for able students, worksheets, and a bibliography on semantics are also included. (JB)

ED027317

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Unit 702

Changes in the Meanings of Words: I

TE 001 263

CAUTIONARY NOTE

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Materials Needed

Connell, Richard, "The Most Dangerous Game," in The Short Story Reader, edited by Rodney A. Kimball, Odyssey Press (New York, 1961).

Hayakawa, S. I. Language in Thought and Action. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1949)

Johnson, Wendell. People in Quandries (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946).

Postman, Neil and Damon, The Languages of Discovery (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

Swift, Jonathon, "A Voyage to Laputa" in Gulliver's Travels (New York: Collier Books, pp. 176-177).

(See also - - bibliography)

Sample Introduction

The first part of our discussion today will involve something generally not associated with an English class--the process of mapmaking. Later, we will apply some of our conclusions to language, and hopefully the comparison or analogy will make some important concepts about language more clear to you.

PROCEDURE: Have each student draw a map of the main hall, classroom, auditorium, etc. of the school without consulting other students. When they have finished, ask the class to exchange maps.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the map which you now have in fron of you different from the one which you drew?

   (Emphasize that some maps are more detailed than others and that they all vary on items selected and excluded.)

2. Even though the maps are different, is the territory different?

   (No; the territory remains essentially the same.)

3. How would you then describe the relationship of the maps to the territory?

   (The maps stand for, represent, or symbolize the territory, but they show different things.)

4. Why do you suppose no two of your maps were the same? Why, for example, might one student include a sign which points to the cafeteria and another might not?

   (The interests of the mapmaker very. Perhaps one student is hungry, the other not. This influences how we perceive things.)

5. Is there any other reason why the maps are different? As you drew the map, who did you imagine the future map reader to be?

   (Answers will vary.)

6. How did this influence what you selected and excluded?

7. How would you change your map for an electrician? a plumber? a new student?

8. Would it be possible, do you suppose, to include all details of the front hall on a map?

   (No; the result would be chaotic. In addition, by the time the map was completed, the territory represented would have changed.)

SUMMARIZE DISCUSSION TO THIS POINT, EMPHASIZING THE FOLLOWING:

LIST ON CHALKBOARD

I. The map is not the territory; it only represents or symbolizes the territory.

II. Maps of one territory will differ because of the purposes and interests of the mapmakers.

III. It is not possible to tell everything about the territory with the map.

9. We saw earlier that although a territory remains constant, maps of it may differ widely. Can we in a similar fashion take one "thing" or referent and describe it with different verbal maps?

   To answer this question, let's take (John) and draw some verbal (word) maps of him. What might cause one person's description of John to differ from another's?

   (That person's relationship to John and his interests in John.)

PROCEDURE: Select a student in the class and describe him from different points of view.

10. How might the following people describe John?
    a dentist
    a football coach
    a shoe salesman

11. Again, what causes the verbal maps or descriptions to differ? Why does each mapmaker or writer select different things to say about John?

    (a. Each person has had different experiences with John.
    b. Each person is interested in different aspects of John.
    c. The purpose of each person's description will most likely be different.)

12. We saw that it was impossible to show on one map all the details of the front hall. Is it possible in one description to say all there is to say about John? Why or why not?

(It is not possible since there are an infinite number of things to say about John and since John is continually changing.)

13. Now let's get back to language. Can you see any similarities between the maps and language or words?

(Both language and the maps are symbolic.
They stand for something else.
Word/Thing (Referent)
Map/Territory
The word is not the thing.
The map is not the territory.)

NOTE TO TEACHER: You may wish to give shorter names to these semantic principles. Those used by Wendell Johnson in People in Quandries are:

1. Non-identity (The word is not the thing.)
2. Non-allness (It is impossible to say all there is tosay about something.)
3. No one thing stays the same.

SUMMARIZE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MAPS AND LANGUAGE:

I. Both are symbolic. The word is not the thing. The map is not the territory. Many maps of the same territory are possible.

II. Both maps and verbal descriptions are incomplete. They leave out details.

III. The referents (thing, territory) inboth cases are continually changing.

To make certain you have understood this discussion, you will complete a short writing assignment which asks you to apply some of the ideas we've been discussing.

PROCEDURE: Distribute Worksheet #1.

Worksheet #1 Name _____

DIRECTIONS: Describe yourself from thepo ints of view of two people who have different interests in and different attitudes toward you. (You might, for example, write from the points of view of two different teachers.) Both the details mentioned and the words used should reflect the differences between the two people describing you.

I.

II.

ANSWER BRIEFLY:

1. Were the "verbal maps" different?
2. Were they describing the same person?
3. Did either "verbal map" tell all about you?
4. What, specifically, do the details selected reveal about the interests and attitudes of the two authors?

PROCEDURE: A class discussion should follow completion of student papers, with special emphasis given to the following points:

1. Neither description tells all about the subject.
2. The words used to describe the subject are symbols and are not to be confused with the subject itself.
3. The author of each description or verbal map has selected and excluded details.
4. Interests, attitudes, past experiences affect which details are selected for the "map".

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO FOLLOW ABOVE DISCUSSION

1. We have seen that neither description of you told all about you; in fact, you probably feel that they say very little. Perhaps you have been asked to describe a person you know to a friend who has never met him, and realized that your description was inadequate. Do you suppose it would be possible to give a complete description? Explain your answer.

   (No. There is no limit to the number of things which can be said about an individual; in addition, the individual is constantly changing.)

2. Nevertheless, we do draw verbal maps of people every day. What do you think determines what things we say about them, what we select and what we leave out?

   (Our experiences with the person, our interests, our attitudes.)

3. This process of selecting and leaving out details is an extremely important idea to keep in mind during this unit, since whenever we use language, whenever we decide to comment on something, we have selected certain details and left out others. We are going to give a name to this process to make discussion of it more convenient. The process of selecting and leaving out details is called ABSTRACTION. We say that when we are selecting and excluding details we are ABSTRACTING. Perhaps one of the descriptions in the assignment you completed for today left out a greater number of details than the other. If so, that description is more highly ABSTRACTED.

USE CHALKBOARD

PROCEDURE: Distribute Maps A and B ov Mudville to the students.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. Let's go back to some maps to help us understand the abstraction process better.

5. Study the two maps of Mudville carefully. Has the mapmaker used the abstraction process? Explain how you know.

   (Yes, each mapmaker has used the abstraction process since he has selected only certain details about Mudville to put on his map. Neither map tells everything about Mudville.)

6. We see then that both maps illustrate the abstraction process. Study them again. Do you think that either of the maps is more highly abstracted than the other? Why or why not?

   (Yes, Map B is more highly abstracted because it contains fewer details about Mudville.)

Have students keep the maps

7. If someone had not seen the actual town of Mudville, do you think he would get a different impression from each map? Explain.

   (Yes, since each map emphasizes different aspects of Mudville.)

8. And do you suppose that someone who has never met you would get different impressions from the two descriptions or verbal maps you wrote in your last assignment?

   (Yes, since each author has selected different details and words to describe you.)

9. Can you think of some "verbal maps" of you which exist right here in the school?

   (counseling files, lunchroom gossip, scholastic reports sent home, report cards)

10. Can you imagine any dangers in a person reading any of the above and forgetting that abstraction has taken place in each case?

    (The individual might forget that "the word is not the thing," might confuse the description with the actual person. He might also forget that the description is incomplete or that the details selected reflect the biases of the writer.)

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CON'T.

PROCEDURE: Writing assignment from Postman and Damon, Languages of Discovery, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965.

PROCEDURE: Following completion of the assignment, a class discussion should follow which is based on the students' paper. The worksheet reviews the semantic principles of non-identity, non-allness, and 'no one thing stays the same' and adds the fourth and final principle discussed in the unit: "No two things are alike even though they have the same label." Questions to elicit the fourth principle are at the right.

The assignment consists of a series of questions about the meaning of a letter grade the students may have received.

11. To illustrate the preceding points, let's consider how a grade on a report card illustrates abstraction. Specifically, we will want to see how confusion and disagreement often result from people's failure to realize that
(1) The word is not the thing. (Non-identity)
(2) It is impossible to tell all about anything (Non-allness)
(3) No one thing stays the same

12. Now let's look at the assignment. Did the other students who received the same grade perform in the class in precisely the same way you did? What were some of the differences? What were some of the similarities?

13. Did the grade which you all received reflect the similarities or the differences?

(The similarities)

14. How, then, is a grade on a report card an example of abstraction?

(It has left out the details which made the students different.)

15. We have seen, however, that all of these students received the same grade and had the same "label," so to speak. How is this possible?

(Apparently the students had certain things in common which the teacher felt important and which put them in the same group.)

16. We see, then, that people who received the same grade (label) are not identical. This leads us to the fourth principle that concerns us in our study of abstraction: No two things are alike even though they may have the same label. A word or label stands for a category.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CON'T

17. Can you see any dangers in people's failure to realize that students with the same grade are not alike?

    (A college admissions board may assume that a "B" student from a high school with extremely high standards is the same as a "B" student from a high school with lower standards and less competition. Or your English teacher next year might think that one of my "C" students did the same kind of work and was graded on the same standards as the "C" students who had other teachers.)

NOTE: Additional discussion may be necessary to make the point that the use of subscripts acts as a reminder, reminding a person that individual members of a category are not necessary identical.

18. People who study semantics--the abstraction process, what words mean, and how people react to and use verbal symbols--have suggested that we avoid the dangers we just talked about by thinking, "C student$_1$" is not "C student$_2$."

    You have probably also wished at times that people would remember that teenager$_1$ is not teenager$_2$ is not teenager$_3$. How would you describe people's notion of the category "teenager"? I'm certain you don't fit that description precisely (although you share some of the characteristics), and wish that adults would remember that no two things are alike even though they have the same label. A word stands for a category.

19. Now let's think about other points. How many of you said that it would be unfair to judge your future performance on the basis of one grade? Why?

    (Students change--they may improve or they may show a decline in their studies. It would be unfair and inaccurate to assume that "once a 'D' student, always a 'D' student.")

NOTE: Teachers may wish to introduce the term "stereotype" or "typing" as labels for categories as these.

20. Can you think of other situations in which a label has been applied to someone in his past and he has been judged unfairly in the future as a result?

    (Criminals, ex-convicts, "discipline problems," etc.)

21. To help us remember that no one thing stays the same, semanticists suggest that we think, "John$_{1960}$ is not John$_{1966}$".

REVIEW MAJOR POINTS OF UNIT SO FAR:

1. Language is symbolic. Words stand for or represent their referents. The word is not the thing. (non-identity)

2. One referent can be described by many different "verbal maps."

3. No one "map" or description can tell all about the referent. (non-allness)

4. Any map involves selecting and excluding details. This process is called abstraction.

5. The details we select are influenced by our past experiences, our interests, our attitudes, and our purposes in making the verbal map.

6. The use of language necessarily involves abstraction. It is important to remember the following semantic principles:
   a. The word is not the thing.
   b. It is impossible to say "everything about anything."
   c. No two things are alike, even though they may have the same label.
   d. No one thing stays the same.

Have students look at their maps of Mudville.

1. Which of these maps did we say is more highly abstracted?

   (Map B)

2. Why?

   (Because it contains fewer specific details about Mudville.)

3. Do you suppose that words can be more or less abstract, too? Can you think of two words that refer to the same thing but include different amounts of detail?

   (seventh-grader, student, puppy, dog)

If this question doesn't get any response, suggest a specific object and ask students to think of some more abstract names for it.

Hand out abstraction ladders, as adapted from Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949. p. 169.

For any one referent, there can be many levels of abstraction. The sheet I am handing out shows some of the levels of abstraction you could use in describing a certain object. What is the referent of this diagram? That is, what thing do the terms refer to?

(a cow)

4. From our study of semantics, what are some of the things we know about this cow? Can we say everything there is to say about her?

   (no)

5. Can we know everything there is to know about her? Why not?

   (Because the number of possible details is very large, and continually changing.)

6. Suppose we had this cow in the front of the classroom, and we could see her and touch her and hear her when she moos. Would you say that the cow we perceive is different from the cow that actually exists?

   (yes)

7. What are some of the details about her that we probably wouldn't be paying any attention to? Think about what's going on inside her body, for instance.

   (Blood is circulating, she is digesting food, her nerves are sending messages, cells are dying and being replaced, electrons, atoms, and molecules are moving in all parts of her body.)

8. All these things, then, are happening inside her body, and we can see her, touch her, hear her, and probably smell her without paying any attention to them at all. So there are a lot of details left out. Do you suppose, then, that we could say that the cow we perceive is abstracted from the total cow?

   (yes)

9. On your diagram the total cow is represented at the very bottom of the abstraction ladder, and the cow we perceive is at the second level. Why is the name "Bessie" one level higher than the cow itself?

   (because it leaves out details)

10. What are some of the details it leaves out? Suppose you are the farmer who owns her. Can you tell by looking at her whether she's awake or asleep, or whether she's young or old?

    (yes)

11. Could you tell by hearing the name "Bessie?"

    (no)

12. Then these are some of the details the name leaves out--the difference between Bessie awake and Bessie asleep, or the difference between Bessie$_{1960}$ and Bessie$_{1966}$. Now look at the fourth level. What does the word "cow" leave out about her?

    (the differences between her and other cows)

Continue up the ladder discussing what is excluded and included at each level.

13. As you go on up the ladder, what seems to be happening? How much specific detail about Bessie is included at the bottom, and how much at the top?

    (there is less and less specific detail at the higher levels of abstraction.)

14. What else is happening? What is Bessie being grouped with at level 5 of the diagram? What is she being grouped with at the highest level?

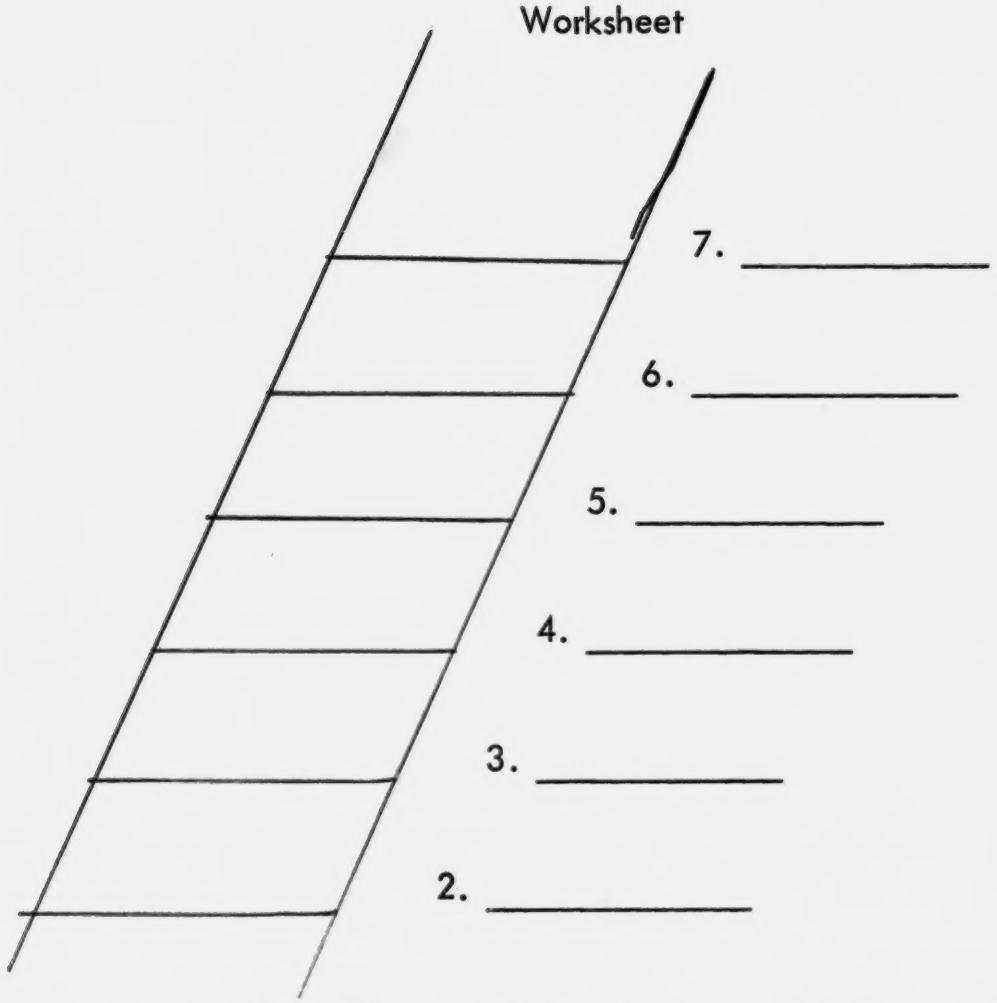
    (at level 5 she is grouped with other farm animals; at level 8 she is grouped with money, land, buildings, jewels, and all the other forms of wealth; when Bessie is included in a different group, we can say she is being placed in a different category.)

15. Is there any relationship between these two things? Can you imagine a case with more specific detail and more items in the group, or vice versa?

    (No. As the group increases in size, fewer and fewer details can be included about each item.)

Pass out worksheet.

Worksheet



1. the painting itself (this is the process level)

Directions:
Order the following names on the abstraction ladder
The lowest level of abstraction belongs at the bottom, the highest at the top. When you have finished, answer the questions below.

modern art

a Van Gogh painting

culture

the Impressionist period

"The Potato Eaters"

art

Questions:

1. Where do you find more specific detail about the painting? At the upper levels or at the lower levels of abstraction?

2. What is the painting grouped with at level 3 of the ladder? That is, what else could fit into that category?

3. What is it grouped with at level 6? Name some other things that belong in that same class of things.

For a discussion on why it is necessary to abstract--see any text of "A Voyage to Laputa" from Gulliver's Travels. For instance, Collier Books, New York, 1962. pp. 176-177.

1. In this passage, the professors of the academy are trying to improve the language of their country by abolishing abstraction. Do you agree that this would be an improvement? Why not?

   (many possible answers--answers should eventually include the idea that there are a lot of things they wouldn't be able to talk about)

2. What, for instance?

   (things they couldn't carry around with them... abstract ideas like love, justice, freedom, etc.)

3. Remember in 701 when we were talking about explaining things to a child, and we used the words "concrete" and "abstract?" How did we use them?

   (concrete things we could perceive with out senses, abstract ideas we could not)

4. We are using the word "abstract" slightly differently now. But would you agree that the referents of the words at the bottom of the abstraction ladder--like "cow" or "'The Potato Eaters'" --can be sensed more easily than the referents of the words at the top--like "wealth" or "art?"

   (yes)

5. What are some words that stand for concrete things?

   (names of concrete things)

6. Suppose I make the statement "The word 'shoe' (use one of their examples) is an abstraction." Would you agree or disagree? Why?

   (because we don't perceive any one shoe in its entirety...because there are many different objects that all belong in the class "shoe"-- high heels, sneakers, sandals, etc.)

Refer students to "Bessie the cow" discussion if necessary.

7. So even words that stand for concrete things are abstract, in a sense. The words "shoe" and "cow" and " 'The Potato Eaters'" are abstract, but they are less abstract than "article of clothing" and "animal" and "work of art". What do you suppose it would be like if our language didn't have any highly abstract words? If we had words like "bookcase", "armchair", "kitchen table" and "reading lamp", but no more abstract words for these things, how would you have to tell somebody to bring the furniture into the house?

(you would have to name everything)

8. That would take a long time. Here's another situation: suppose that you live in an isolated village of four families, each one owning a house. A's house is called maga, B's house biyo, C's house kata, D's house pelel. This is quite satisfactory for ordinary communication, but suppose a new family comes to the village and needs a place to live. What problems do you think the people would have talking about the projected house?

(they wouldn't have anything to call it)

9. What would they have to do?

(invent a word)

10. This is the kind of need which causes people to make up abstract words. The invention of a new abstraction is an important step forward, because it makes discussion possible, -- in this case, not just the discussion of a fifth house, but of all future houses you may build or see in your travels or just dream about. To underline the importance of this, think back to what we said about animal communication in 701. What important characteristics did we say human communication has that animal communication lacks?

(displacement, productivity)

Review the meaning of these terms. See Unit 701 -- "Talking Animals".

11. Does the communication system of the professors at Swift's academy have displacement?

(no, they can only communicate about the objects right in front of them.)

Additional questions may be necessary to elicit these responses. See Unit 701.

Summarize why we need to abstract:
1. To talk about abstract ideas.
2. To say things more briefly.
3. To say what has never been said before.

12. Does it have productivity?

(in a limited sense--they can say new things, but only about what is happening in front of them, not about what will happen in the future or what they imagine.

13. What does productivity have to do with abstraction?

(Abstraction gives us verbal categories in which we can put things or ideas we've never talked about before.)

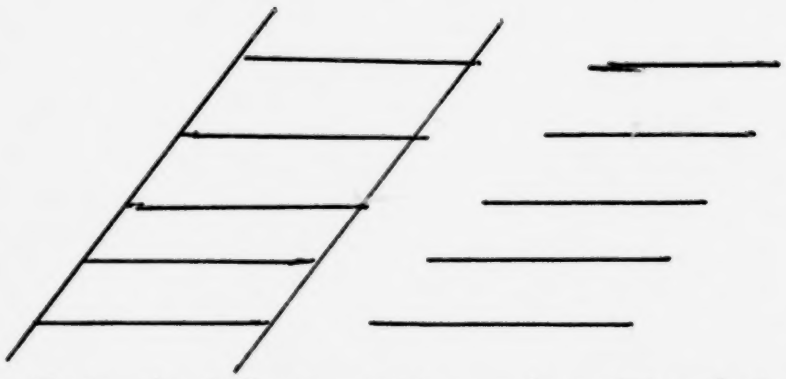
Pass out worksheet on levels of abstraction.

If there is time, discuss problems of faculty abstraction. As examples, use the story "The Blind Men and the Elephant", or have some students bring in examples of optical illusions. Additional information on faculty abstraction may be found in Wendell Johnson's People in Quandaries pp. 143-151.

Worksheet on Levels of Abstraction

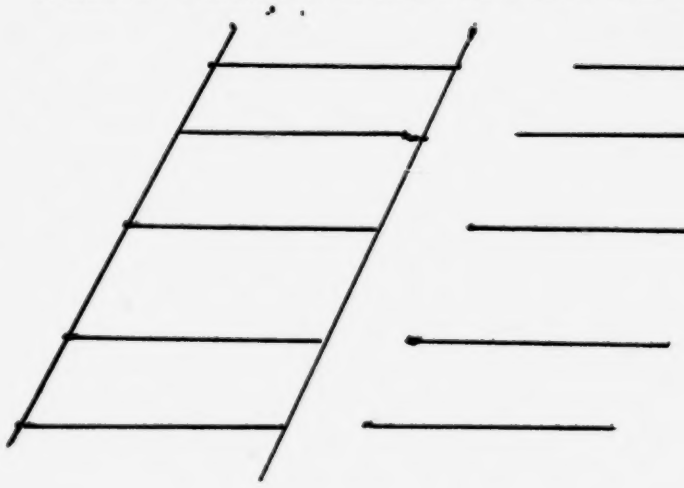
Sentences, as well as single words, can be placed on a ladder of abstraction according to how much detail, relevant to the original event or idea, is included.

Give them an exercise with single words first. All we have worked with so far is Bessie and cows, and they haven't had an activity of their own.



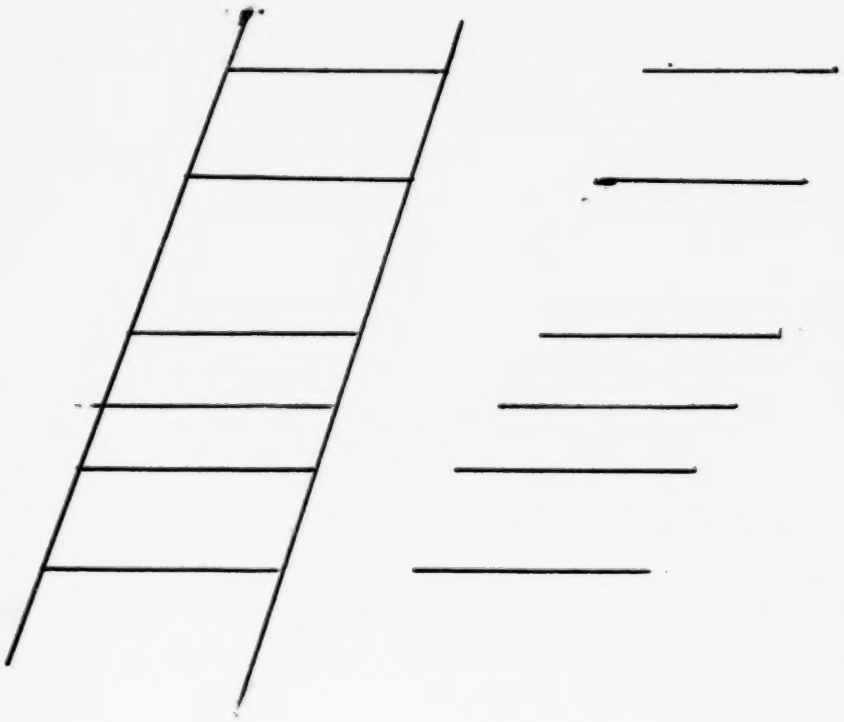
1. Apple
2. Fruits
3. Food
4. Jonathan Apples
5. Fresh Fruits

Order the following sentences by writing their numbers in the appropriate places on the ladder. Assume that the sentences include reference to the same events.



1. This is a lousy meal.
2. Everywhere I go, I always seem to hit the worst restaurants.
3. If you know what's good for you, you won't eat at Jackson's Diner.
4. There's no good place to eat in this town.
5. The butter on my potatoes is rancid.

Do the same with the following.



1. The Republicans scored a smashing victory in last week's election.
2. Henry Bassett, the Republic candidate, tallied 43,793 votes in the district election. Democrat George P. Holliday tallied 31, 335.
3. Henry Bassett won by a landslide.
4. GOP victories sweep nation!
5. Well, things are looking down for the Democratic party around here.
6. 12,458 is an unusually wide margin for a district election.

Worksheet Con't

Abstraction is a process that emphasizes some details and leaves out others. When you arrange these sentences according to level of abstraction, put them into two groups according to what feature of the event they emphasize.

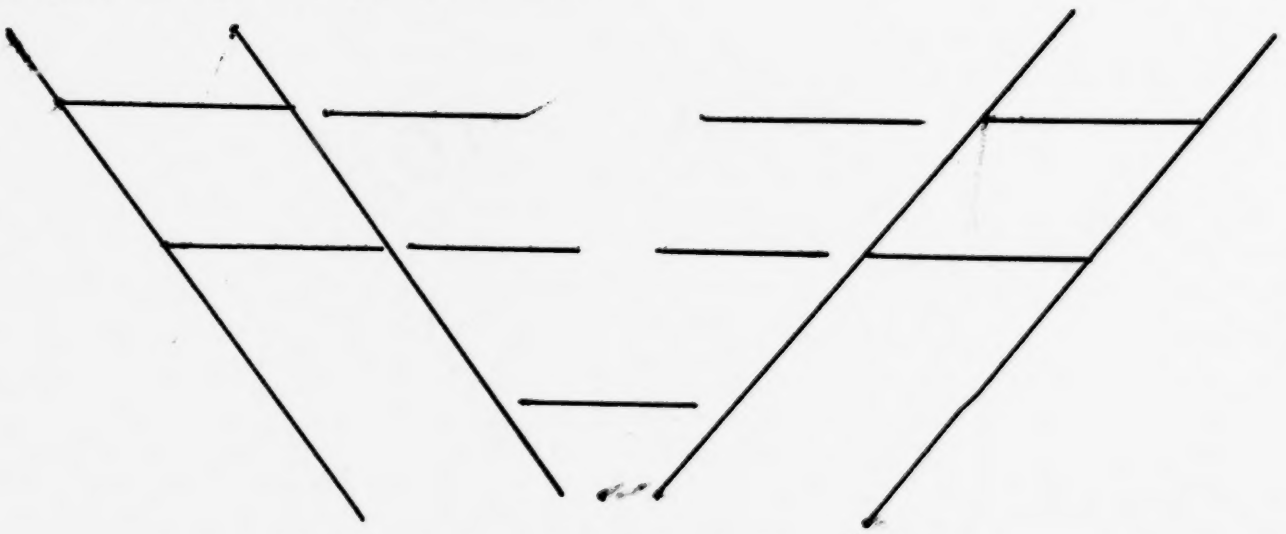
Sheila doesn't know how to handle dogs.

Rocco is a vicious dog.

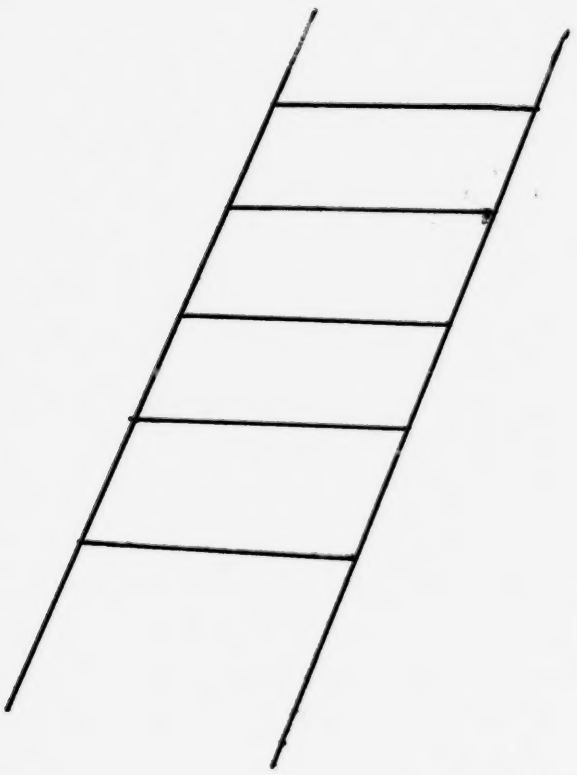
When Sheila tried to pull the dog out of her rose garden, he bit her.

Dogs are too unpredictable to be allowed to run loose.

Americans just don't get along with animals.



Given the following sentence, make up two more at higher levels, and two more at lower levels of abstraction, so that you end up with a ladder like the others.



_____

_____

Never again will I buy at Mr. Babcock's Hardware Store.

_____

_____

For the students' understanding of dead-level abstraction, it should be very useful at this point to provide a living example. It should be possible to get the class into the kinds of discussion that never leaves the higher levels of abstraction with a question like "What is the purpose of education?" or "Why do we study literature?" or "What is democracy?" A sample dialogue illustrating dead-level abstraction can be found on p. 175 of Hayakawa's Language in Thought and Action (New York: Harcourt Brace & World), 1949.
Pass back worksheets
Discussion of worksheets on levels of abstraction

1. If you wanted to find out, for each situation, whether the statements are true or not, which would be the easiest to work with?

   (the ones at the lowest levels of abstraction)

2. How would you go about finding out whether statement 2 in the second series is true?

   (read the newspapers, get official tally sheets, check the voting machines)

3. How would you go about checking on statement 6?

   (get election results from other years, find out what the average margin is)

4. How about statement 4?

   (get election results from all over the country)

5. So the truth of this highly abstract statement depends on the truth of a number of low level abstractions--election results from all over the country. Hayakawa says that the test of abstraction is whether they are referrable to lower levels, that is whether they can be made to point down the ladder to less abstract statements. If you make a statement about civil rights in Wisconsin, you should be able to refer down the abstraction ladder to some particular information about national, state, and local laws, about the behavior of police, judges, school boards, real estate men, hotel managers, and the general public in Wisconsin.

Point out that many discussions, such as the earlier class discussion on Hayakawa's dialogue on democracy, become deadlocked because high level abstractions are not referred to lower ones.

EXERCISE:
Ask the class to think of some statements that would be high on an abstraction ladder. List them on the board. Then ask them for each statement to name some low level abstractions that it should be referrable to.

Pass out Wendell Johnson excerpt on dead-level abstraction. You may want to discuss whether or not the Johnson article is interesting. Source: Johnson, Wendell, People in Quandaries: The Semantics of Personal Adjustment, Harper & Brothers, (New York, 1946), p. 270 and following.

Transition

One master of this kind of definition--the kind that describes abstract ideas in very concrete terms--is Charles Schulz.

Get a copy of Happiness is a Warm Puppy by Charles Schulz to show the class. Compare Schulz's definitions with the dictionary definition. Discuss with the students why the book is so popular, then ask them to do the same sort of thing with one of the given words.

ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the abstract words below and write a paragraph describing its meaning to someone who has never heard the word. Try to communicate as many dimensions of the meaning as possible by using concrete examples drawn from the experience of the reader; appeal to his senses of sight, taste, smell, and touch.

hate	cruelty	sadness	love
beauty	justice	loneliness	fear
joy	pride	peace	loyalty
courage	death	kindness	disappointment

DISCUSSION

Ask one student to read his paragraph aloud.

Have other students read their descriptions.

It may be necessary to give examples to get the proper response.

1. Is this a complete definition?

   (no)

2. How could it be made more complete?

   (by listing more specific instances)

3. Suppose one of you made a list that included all your experiences with one of these ideas, say "disappointment", that you could think of. Would this list be different from someone else's?

   (yes)

4. Does the word mean something different to you than it does to another person?

   (yes)

5. Would there be some experiences with "disappointment" on your list that would be the same as, or very similar to somebody else's?

   (yes)

6. It looks as if we're dealing with two different kinds of meaning for a single word--one kind that most people share, and another kind that is different for different people. Let's take another example: what does the word "professor" mean?

   (someone who has been given a certain academic rank by a university)

7. We say that is the denotative meaning of the word. Does the word "professor" mean anything else to you? What do you think of when you hear the word?

   (there should be a variety of positive and negative responses)

   That is the connotative meaning of the word. If you look up "professor" in the dictionary, the definition you will find will be a denotative one. All the other ideas the word suggests to you make up its connotative meaning. Words tend to have the same denotation for everybody, but their connotations are often different for different people.

8. Sometimes words have the same denotation, but different connotations. Can someone think of two words that denote the same thing, but suggest different attitudes toward it?

If not, suggest pairs like dog, mutt; slender, skinny; policeman, cop. Explain that these words can be thought of as different maps of the same territory.

Among the terms suggested by the class will probably be some examples of euphemism. If not, ask leading questions to get such examples as die, pass away; sweat, perspire; toilet, rest room, etc.

9. Why do people tend to use words like this?

   (because some are shocked by the use of the basic term)

10. The substitution of a less offensive word for another word considered impolite or shocking is called <u>euphemism</u>. What does the use of euphemism say about the speaker? About the kind of individual he is?

    (It shows that he is sensitive to the audience, to the possibility he may hurt feelings or shock someone.)

Additional questions may be necessary to elicit this response.

11. Why does a good speaker sometimes resort to the use of euphemism?

    (If he wishes to communicate, or persuade, or argue, or inform, he wants the full message to get across. He wants as little interference as possible and shock would interfere with the message.)

Euphemism is another example of a fact about language that we have been discussing all through this unit. Most events or things have more than one potential name, and this variety of names allows us to express varying shades of meaning. In this way we can change our manner of discussing a topic to suit the needs or interests of a given audience.

Pass out Hayakawa's article "Is She Skinny, Thin or Svelte?" (From <u>Literary Cavalcade</u>, March, 1949). Have students informally try the exercises at the end of the article.

TRANSITION

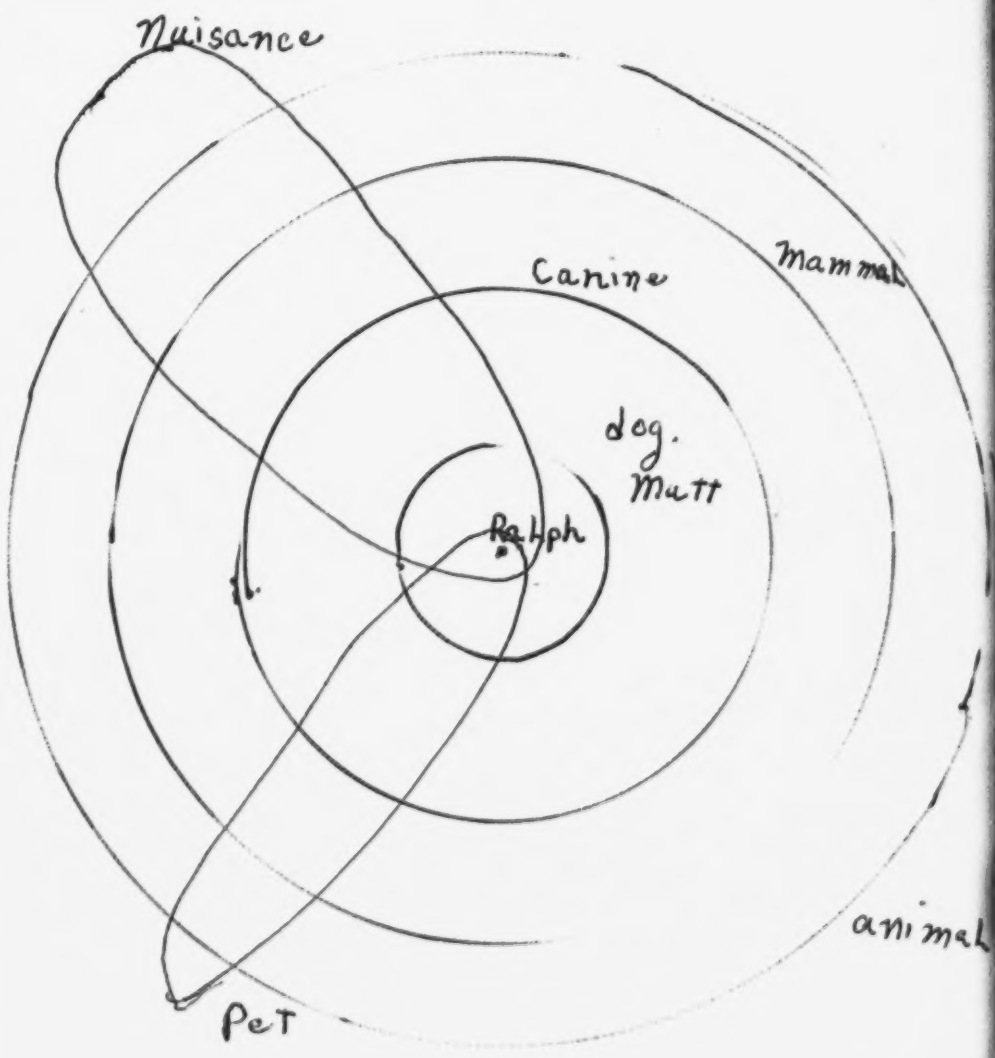
Euphemisms can be thought of as different word maps of the same territory. Mapping is one of two devices for representing differences in meaning that we have talked about; the other is the abstraction ladder. These devices are useful for thinking about different kinds of situations. Now we are going to talk about another device.

PROCEDURE:

Write the phrase my dog Ralph on the board. (Note that doing this is in itself an act of abstracting.) Ask the students to think of some more ways of naming him--some more categories he fits into--and write them on the board in the order they are suggested. Ask leading questions to get a variety of terms: canine, man's best friend, dog, beagle, mammal, nuisance, housedog, beast, mole, etc.

Ask the students to order the terms according to level of abstraction, as was done with Bessie the cow. As the criterion for deciding where a term belongs, ask how much detail about Ralph it excludes. It will soon become apparent that although some of the terms are easy to place, there will be disagreement about others.

Suggest that some of the problems can be avoided by using Venn Diagrams. Dog is a subclass of mammal, mammal is a subclass of animal, etc. Draw the circles on the board. The category of pets can be represented by a circle that passes through all the circles already there but leaves out part of each of them. The category "nuisance" can be represented by a circle similar to the one for pets, but that also includes some area outside the animal circle. Words like "mutt" and "dog" are represented by circles covering the same area; they are maps of the same territory.



Introduce the terms subordinate, superordinate, and coordinate. The class of things represented by an outer circle is superordinate to that represented by an inner circle, etc. In this diagram, "dog" and "mutt" are coordinate terms; they cover the same territory.

Divide the class into pairs to play a game similar to "Password." Have two teams, a total of four students, confront each other. One of the team members says a word, then says "subordinate", "superordinate", or "coordinate". Within an agreed upon amount of time one of the opposite team's members must say a word fitting the designation. For instance, if the word were "cucumber" and the command "superordinate", then "vegetable" or "food" would be a suitable response. If the response is appropriate then the teammate of the respondent tosses back a word and command to the first team. The partner of the one who starts should judge the accuracy of the response, and be ready with the right answer if the responding team fails to provide it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you go from a less abstract to a more abstract category, are you also going from a subordinate to a superordinate category?

   (yes)

2. Does it always work the other way around? Is a superordinate category always a more abstract category?

   (no)

If the class doesn't know, ask the students if tney can think of an instance in which it wouldn't be. Ask them to make a Venn diagram using units of time--decade, second, day, minute, hour, century, month, etc. Minute is subordinate to hour, but no less abstract.

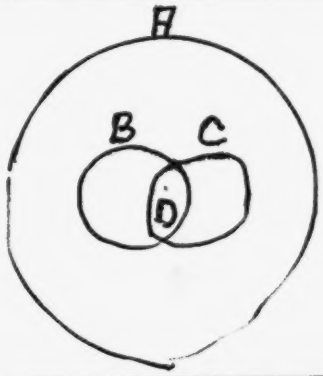
To clarify the use of Venn diagrams, have the class work out the following one:

A. What the word "disappointment" means to all English speakers.

B. What "disappointment" means to Jane.

C. What "disappointment means to Roger.

D. A common experience Jane and Roger have with disappointment.



Have students do Worksheet #23A

Discussion

Discuss application of subordinate, coordinate, and superordinate categories to outlining. Have students outline the school or government personnel in various ways. Discuss results, relating the different hierarchical structures to different points of view.

This might be a good place to talk about mechanics of outlining. Have students do Worksheet #23A, or provide an article for them to outline. Discuss results of work, relating it to effective studying, clear writing, etc.

Worksheet 4

Make a Venn diagram and label the circles to illustrate the following classes of sounds.

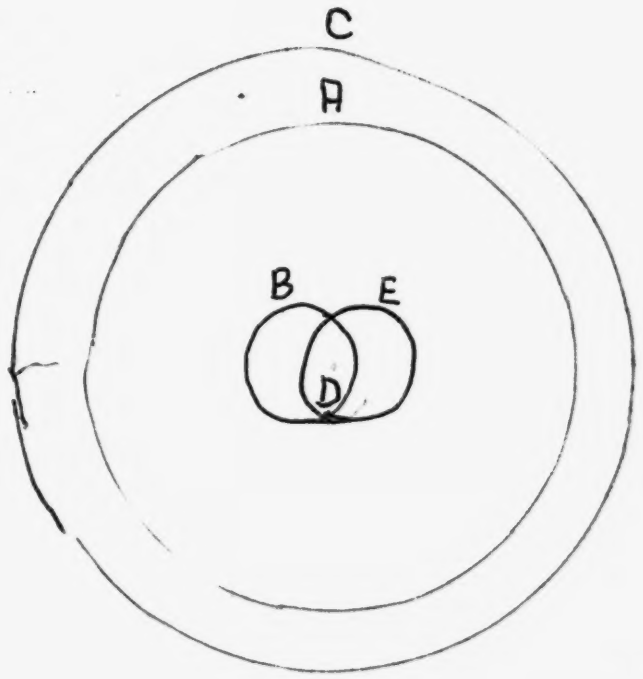
A. all the sounds people can make

B. all the sounds in Arabic

C. noises

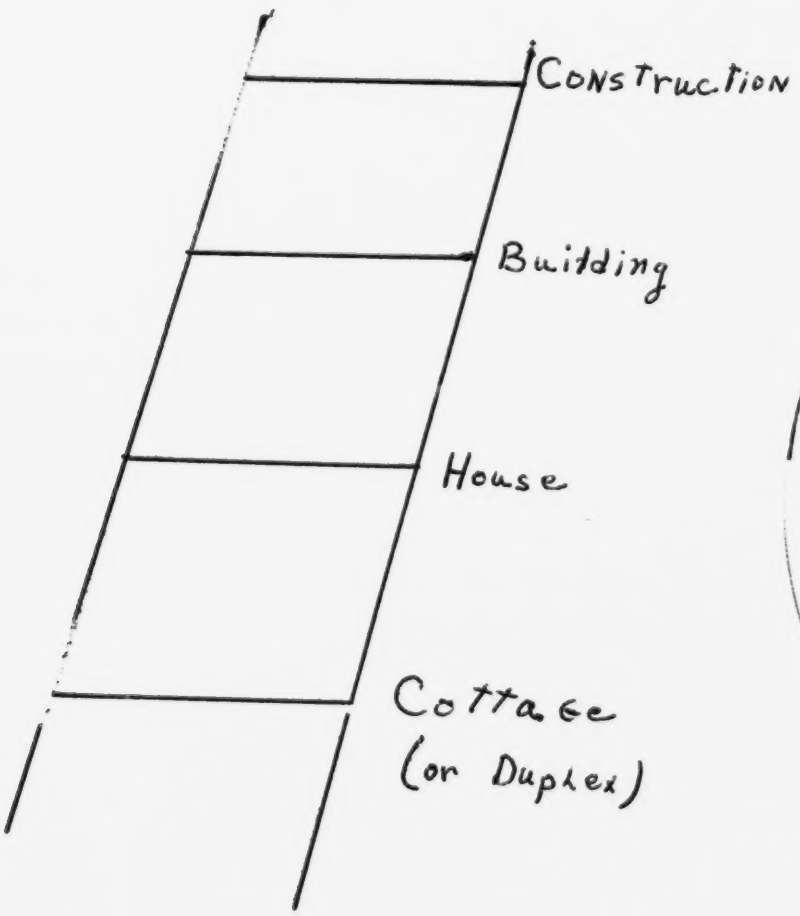
D. sounds in both English and Arabic

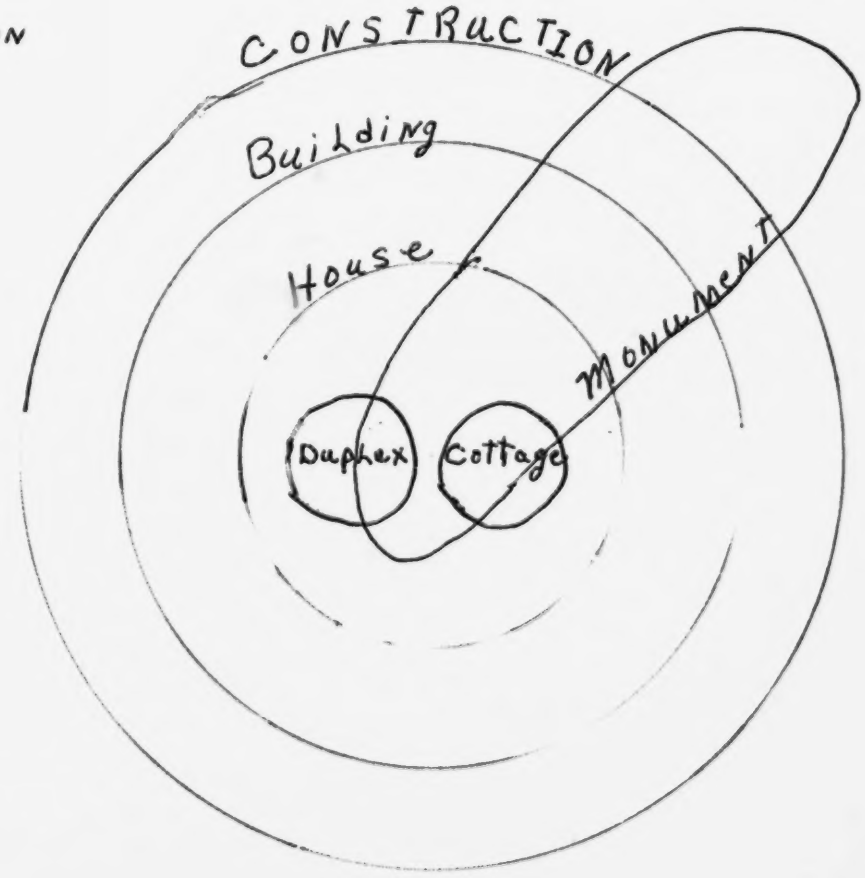
E. all the sounds in English



Given the following list of words, decide which one can be arranged by increasing level of abstraction. Order the appropriate words on an abstraction ladder. Then make a Venn diagram that includes all the terms.

construction, cottage, building, house, duplex, monument





Worksheet Con't

Outlining is often a matter of the proper arrangement of subordinate, coordinate, and superordinate ideas, terminology, or concepts. Arrange the following words in an outline, using the proper outline form.

working breeds...Pekingese...dogs...animal...golden retriever...mammal...Mexican chihuahua...water spaniel...toy breeds...Charley (a golden retriever)...Rachel, also a golden retriever.

beer...strong beer...weak beer...chocolate milk shake...dairy products...Coca Cola... soft drinks...liqueurs...Irish whiskey...beverages...whiskey...skim milk...buttermilk... root beer...alcoholic beverages...Scotch whiskey

PROCEDURE

Pass out Worksheet #4. Have students read, select and discuss choices. Discuss the procedure of making specific statements to validate an abstraction. This sort of activity might take many other forms depending on the class and the teacher. The brighter students might even be led to some consideration of precis writing. Every student would profit from the attempt to detect subordinates and superordinates in written and spoken material and to judge the validity of the statement basing their evaluation on the logic of the structure.

IMPORTANT

PROCEDURE

Summarize material on abstraction...discuss problems of faulty abstraction (Blind Men and Elephant)... necessity of abstraction (characters from Swift carrying around objects to which they wished to refer)... necessity of shifting easily and quickly... its application to writing, organization and thinking.

TO THE TEACHER

SPECIALIZATION AND GENERALIZATION

Stuart Robertson and Frederick Cassidy state that, "One very common type of change is that in which the 'area' of the meaning is changed. When a word that has referred broadly or inclusively begins instead to refer narrowly or exclusively, this is an example of 'specialization' of meaning. The contrary is called 'generalization.'" E. H. Sturtevant refers to the "inclusiveness" of words when speaking of this change. According to Charlton Laird, "Generalization and specialization unquestionably account for much change in meaning. The great bulk of meanings are either logical enlargements of a meaning already established or they are selections from within the general area of a meaning, with developments from within."

As an appealing, attention-getting device with which to introduce these processes of word change, the short story "The Most Dangerous Game"[1] will be read. Not only will it attract student interest, but it will also demonstrate some interesting "generalizations and specialization". The discussion following the story will act as a springboard from which we may dive into the more general area of word change.

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[1]Connel, Richard, "The Most Dangerous Game," in The Short Story Reader, edited by Rodney A. Kimball, Odyssey Press (New York, 1961), pp. 6-28.

PROCEDURE:

"The Most Dangerous Game" should be read by the students. The action and suspense of the story should readily captivate the students. In addition to the students' natural interest in the story, it will be necessary to guide student thought to focus on interesting uses of generalization and specialization. The following outline will be of help.

Sample Introduction

We have seen how words function in terms of abstraction. Now we are going to observe another way in which words change meaning. Remember our previous statement about language behaving as if it were alive? If we are to handle our language gracefully and efficiently, we must be aware of this "language liveliness". We must realize that the meaning of words will not hold still; they shift. We are now going to read an exciting, suspense-filled story in which meaning shifts play an important part. See how alert you can be to the meaning shifts when the following words are used:

hunting, hunter, hunt

animal, animals

PROCEDURE

(Write the sentence, "He was hunting the animal," on the board. Ask students to explain what "hunting" and "animal" would generally mean.)

Sample Discussion Questions

(Selected from items from among these might be duplicated and given to students as study guides to use before and as they read the story.)

1. Discuss the meanings of the words as used in the story compared to the students' previously conceived definitions.

   a. "Great sport, hunting."

   b. "The world is made up of two classes--the hunters and the hunted. Luckily, you and I are hunters."

   c. "...the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror."

   d. "...some wounded thing, by the evidence a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush."

e. "I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt."

f. "We will have some capital hunting, you and I."

g. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt."

h. "Tonight we will hunt, you and I."

2. When did you first realize that Zaroff and Rainsford each had different meanings for animal?

   (answers here will vary according to the perceptiveness of the students)

3. Whose meaning is more specialized? Whose is more generalized? Explain your reasoning.

   (Zaroff's may be said to be more generalized in the sense that he includes human beings in a class, animals to be hunted.)

Procedure: Here it might be wise to introduce the terms "specialization" and "generalization" and apply them to Zaroff's and Rainsford's definitions of animal".

4. Whose definition of animal is forced to undertake a shift in meaning? Is it toward generalization or specialization?

   (Rainsford is forced to include man in the "animal to be hunted" category.)

5. When you first heard the title of the story, what did you take as the meaning of "game"? If you were mistaken, when were you forced to change your meaning? What did you think when you heard Zaroff say, "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous game."?

   (most students probably thought of "game" in terms of "sports," later in terms of animals to be hunted, finally in terms of man.)

6. Contrast these two statements. In which is the term "heads" more specific?

a. "You have some wonderful heads here..."

b. "And now I want to show you my new collection of heads."

How does this change of meaning correspond to the change undergone by the term "animal"?

(The contrast is obvious, from animals to man.)

EXAMPLES OF GENERALIZATION AND SPECIALIZATION

Procedure:
Duplicate or place on the chalkboard examples of generalization and specialization.

GENERALIZATION

1. Sometimes words generalize their meanings historically. That is, they have begun life referring to rather specific things, but have assumed a more general meaning as history has progressed. For example:

   Dilapidated (from Latin Lapis, meaning atone) could only refer to stone structures.

   Candidate (from Latin candidus, meaning white)

   Holiday meant "holy day".

   Bonfire referred to "bone fire".

2. Here are some other examples of generalizations from rather specific beginnings:

   Picture once meant only "painted ones" (the Picts).

   Butcher (from the French "bouc") meant one who kills goats only.

   Sail, which referred only to boats using sails, has now been transferred to almost any kind of water navigation.

   Injury was once limited to injustice.

   Zest, which once meant a bit of lemon peel.

   Chest, which referred to a coffin. Chaucer's clerk, when speaking of Petrarch, says, "He is now deed and nayled in his cheste".

In discussion, establish point that when words generalize, they go from a subordinate to a superordinate class.

3. Some of today's words have generalized to the extent that they may stand for nearly anything.

   For example:

   Thing Matter

   Business Article

   Concern Circumstance

   Condition

Note: It should be mentioned that it is the public who generalizes in this manner, despite the cautious use of such names by the manufacturers.

4. Some brand names have generalized in meaning to cover the whole range of a product.

   Frigidaire has come to stand for refrigerators in general.

   Scotch tape now covers the general area of all cellophane tapes.

   Popsicle now stands for a general area of ice water treats.

   Kodak now refers to cameras and pictures in general.

   Coke has come to stand for cola in general. A law suit was once instituted to refrain users from employing the term this way.

   Kleenex now refers to the general area of all facial tissues.

SPECIALIZATION

1. The process of specialization is even more frequent than generalization. Here are some of the forms it can take.

   undertaker - this person could "undertake" to do anything.

   liquor - this was once synonymous with liquid.

   disease - this meant "lack of ease."

   girl - a girl was at one time a young person of either sex.

corn - this word once meant grain. In Scotland it specified oats. In England it came to mean wheat. (Not knowing this fact, a government agency during the war bought "corn" for European famine relief at the request of the British government, and this bit of linguistic ignorance cost a few million dolars to repair.)

2. Words that were once synonymous competed with each other until one specialized in meaning.

   bird--fowl
   dog--hound
   chair--stool

Point out that these are changes from superordinate to subordinate categories.

Procedure -- pass out worksheet

An examination of the dictionary will frequently show us interesting examples in the changes of meaning of words. One of the most revealing studies in how words change meaning is that of comparing "old" dictionaries to those of the present day. In this exercise we shall examine some fairly common words of today as they are found in Samuel Johnson's dictionary published in 1775. When provided with Johnson's students should be able to tell with ease whether these words have specialized or generalized in meaning to the present day. The excerpts are presented in worksheet form with Johnson's definitions at the left. Blank spaces are provided at the right for the student's writing of today's meanings. Most students will be able to compare without consulting the dictionary. Others may wish to use the dictionary for verification. (More information on Johnson's dictionary can be found in Project English Unit 902, The Dictionary; Describer or Prescriber.)

Here are some words and their definitions taken from Samuel Johnson's dictionary published in 1775. The words have shifted meanings considerably to the present day. See if you can give the modern meaning or meanings for these words. In addition, can you tell whether the shift has been toward generalization or specialization?

JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY		PRESENT DAY MEANING(S)
abracadabra	a superstitious charm against agues.	
absentee	He that is absent from his station, employment or country. A word used commonly with regard to Irishmen living out of their country.	
anthology	A collection of flowers.	
beau	(beau, Fr. It is sounded like bo. and has often the French plural beaux). A man of dress; a man whose great care is to deck his person.	
diploma	A letter or writing conferring some privilege, so called because they used formerly to be written on waxed tables, and be folded together.	
offervescence	The act of growing hot; production of heat by intestine motion.	
recipe	A medical prescription.	

Procedure:

Of interest to both teacher and student will be a more detailed example of how the processes of specialization and generalization take place historically. See Charlton Laird's The Miracle of Language World Publishing Company, New York, 1953. While reading to the students, it will facilitate their understanding to list or outline on the board the changes which have taken place in the word "tap".

Sample Introduction

Here is the life history of a word, or at least as much as we know of it. The word is so simple and short at first glance that its appearance is deceiving. However, it has had had a complex, turbulent life, full of shifts of meaning. See how many shifts you can detect.

Procedure

GAME - SPECIALIZATION

Students will enjoy playing the game of specialization. Perhaps the word "game" is a misnomer. It may take the form of a contest or simply an interesting mental exercise. At any rate, the object of "whatever it is" is to name as many words with specialized meanings in specific fields as possible. The number of fields to be used in such a game is nearly infinite. Likewise, students will be amazed to learn how words take on specialized meanings in the "contexts" of different areas. It is an interesting exercise in the multiplicity of word meanings, each meaning specialized according to its context.

Activity:

What special meanings do these words have when applied to these sports?

Baseball

mitt
hit
home
bat
average
out
strike

Bowling

strike
hook
spare
split

Track and Field

track
baton
kick
tape
put

Golf

club
slice
putt or putter
rough
green
iron
wood

Football

blitz
tackle
guard
pass
down
center

Fishing

lure
rod
cast
strike
fly

Further Suggestions to Students

This game can be played with almost any area of interest. Can you think of others?

Politics

Crime

Theater

Teen-age vocabulary

WHY DO WORDS CHANGE MEANING?

Procedure

A discussion of why words change meaning is appropriate here. Students will be able to furnish some reasons. To aid in such a discussion, see Mario Pei's The Story of Language, pp. 126-127. American Library (Mentor Paperback), New York, 1949. The sample discussion questions which follow will help to guide thought.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Do teen-agers have a special vocabulary?

   (The answer is yes, of course, even though they may be reluctant to divulge all its secrets.)

2. How do you think words such as "dig," "cool," "fuzz," etc. enter your vocabulary?

   (Reactions to this question may vary.)

3. Have previous generations developed specialized *meanings for terms just as yours has?*

   (ex. - "Charleston" era, the era of the great swing bands, etc.)

4. How does the term "generalization" correspond in meaning to the term "abstraction"?

   (This is one of the key concepts to furnish the students. They should realize by now that when we dealt with abstraction we changed from subordinate to superordinate categories. When dealing with specialization and generalization, we observed the change taking place in the meaning of one word.)

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

As the unit develops the teacher may wish to provide additional activities for the brighter student utilizing the concepts being developed. Some possibilities follow.

1. Speeches might be developed utilizing some of the principles of subordination-superordination discussed.

2. The student might be asked to write attempting to support his viewpoint by use of "operational" data.

3. Analysis of simple essays in an attempt to discover the structure of subordination-superordination could be profitable

4. Lead paragraphs of news stories might be analyzed in somewhat the same way.

5. Political speeches could be investigated in terms of "operational" support for major abstractions.

6. Students might analyze two pieces of poetry and discuss the amount of specific detail contained as compared to the more abstracted.

7. The student could develop a notebook of words that presently seem to be undergoing some semantic shift (this might dealwith teen-age slang, the argot of a trade or vocabulary in general).

8. Articles dealing with the development of a dictionary might be assigned for reading and reporting.

9. The semantic shifts words undergo in the midst of figurative language might be discussed and the student given some poetry in which to investigate this business in operation.

10. Students might be asked to listen to friends and family to see if they use any words in common with highly different meanings suggesting specialization or generalization in operation.

11. They might be asked to analyze the "why" of this situation and relate it to reasons for semantic shifts as already discussed in the unit.

TESTING

A. Testing would tend to be subjective. Some manipulative skills might be tested by using lists of words and asking the student to identify various processes in operation, but this is not the "main chance." It would seem that this might best be reached by asking the student to assume various things to be true of a society (perhaps their monetary system is based on the potato): and then ask the student to build a lexicon for this situation reflecting its importance in the culture and demonstrating, in the process, their knowledge of elementary semantics.

B. Provide students with the following information about the word blitz. Ask them to explain the process of generalization-specialization as it has taken place here.

1. blitzkreig enters the English language as a name for the swift movement of infantry and tanks by Nazi armies (about 1939).

2. blitzkreig shortened to blitz and used to refer to air attacks on London (early 1940's).

3. blitz used to refer to any swift, devastating action as in a report of a boxing match: Louis Blitzes Conn or in a report of a tornado: Twister Blitzes Kansas. (throughout 1940's)

4. blitz seldom used today except in football to refer to rushing linebackers as a defensive maneuver.

C. Have students write a glossary of specialized terms in an area of avocational interest. Concentrate on terms which have a more generalized meaning as well. (Example: set, match, game, in tennis)

D. Written or oral report on brand names which have generalized into names of products.

E. Essay test item explaining how the common comment "define your terms" might be taken as a request to exemplify an abstract word.

F. Explanation of how the process of abstraction operates in the character or setting descriptions of a piece of prose fiction.

I. Matching - Match each Subordinate with a Superordinate that is most immediately related to it. (Use a dictionary if necessary)

A. Superordinate	Subordinate
_____ Siamese	1. Animal
_____ Lion	2. Matilda (a Siamese cat)
_____ Mammal	3. Quadruped
_____ Cat	4. Tiger
_____ Organism	5. Mountain Lion

B. Superordinate	Subordinate
_____ Language	1. Code
_____ Sounds	2. Phone
_____ phoneme	3. paragraph
_____ word	4. phrase
_____ sentence	5. morpheme

II. Arrange the following sentences into a paragraph by starting with the most abstract sentence and arranging the subsequent sentences in a descending order of abstraction. (From superordinate to subordinates.)

1. We use words to promote our own purposes in dealing with others.
2. The meaning of a word or phrase is not its dictionary equivalent, but the difference its utterance brings about in a situation.
3. We build up verbal pictures of ourselves and our motives.
4. Mainly our language is an instrument for action.
5. We use words to comfort ourselves in fantasy and daydream, to goad ourselves into one type of activity and to deny ourselves another.

III. Write one paragraph explaining why the circle map is a good way of representing the relationship between superordinates and subordinates.

IV. Explain in one paragraph the way in which superordination, coordination and subordination effect the definition of a given word. Be sure to use an example.

V. The following is a description of the changes in the meaning of the word "blitz." Explain these changes in terms of generalization and specialization.

1. blitzkreig enters the English language as a name for the swift movement of infantry and tanks by Nazi armies (about 1939).

2. blitzkreig shortened to blitz and used to refer to air attacks on London (early 1940's).

3. blitz used to refer to any swift, devastating action as in a report of a boxing match: Louis Blitzes Conn or in a report of a tornado: Twister Blitzes Kansas (through 1940's).

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